

# TOTAL REFLECTIVE ABSTRACTION

Selections from the Cassilhaus Collection

"*Total Reflective Abstraction* might be seen as an expression of our urge towards perfection itself, the secular corollary to a heaven in which thought and the body are one. As a visual modality it is infinite in its ability to project before us new perspectives, distortions, extensions. It is timeless, or perhaps it is time itself, because it only exists, as it exists, now, in the moment of looking."  
-Josiah McElheny

1929: Isamu Noguchi and Buckminster Fuller walk into a bar and conceive of an entirely new mode of abstraction. Truly. Fuller, a theorist, engineer, designer, and author, was eventually to become best known for perfecting the Geodesic Dome while Noguchi, one time stone-cutter for Constantin Brancusi, would become renowned for both his furniture designs and his outdoor sculptural environments. The two met in Romany Marie's in New York's West Village and soon embarked on a collaboration that foreshadowed a trend in contemporary art and design that has never been fully examined. Their first aspiration was to create a sculpture without shadow. To achieve this aim they deduced that a totally reflective environment, where both object and surroundings were composed of mirrored surfaces, was necessary. Noguchi followed through on the idea by painting a small studio entirely silver and placing a chrome coated bust of Fuller inside. While the shadowless sculpture was realized, a new type of abstraction also emerged—one that is immersive and circuitous; endlessly reflective and in turn, reflection inducing.

This was a one-time experiment, however, and the idea of Total Reflective Abstraction was not to be examined again for over seventy-five years through the sculpture and scholarship of Josiah McElheny. McElheny, who sought to fully realize this proposition in his work *Total Reflective Abstraction*, has fabricated a variety of Noguchi's forms in silver and situated them on either a mirrored table or a completely mirrored chamber. As a photographer, I have often wondered if this opus of abstraction could be realized in a photograph. Is it possible to capture in a fraction of a second this idea of total immersion? Can a single image induce a stillness of mind and riot of the eye?

As it happens, many of the photographs in the Cassilhaus Collection court the spirit of Noguchi and Fuller's concept, if not fully embody it. *Total Reflective Abstraction* at Cassilhaus draws a parenthesis around this theme in the collection with *Martique* by André Kertész as the keystone. Both portrait and landscape, the image maps the possibility of both constructs by drawing the viewer to contemplate the contemplation of the subject, a silhouetted figure forever mediated by glass. The work is grounded in a legible image, clearly from life, yet the capacity for projection transcends the corners of the print rendering the still subject in constant flux. This is Total Reflective Abstraction at its photographic best.

Hiroshi Sugimoto speaks to this possibility in the spectacularly rendered photogravure *U.A. Walker, New York 1978*. In his series *Theaters*, Sugimoto employs a large format view camera to make an exposure for the duration of a film. The theater is captured in great detail while the silver screen is for once actually embodied as such, mirror-like. In speaking of his *Seascape* series where he aims his camera in similar fashion at the ocean, Sugimoto says, "I find a spot where I want to stay and then stay there sometimes a week, sometimes a couple weeks, sometimes 3 weeks, and then I just stay there and just feel like I'm a part of this nature and landscape. I start feeling this is the creation of the universe and I'm witnessing it."

I, for one, firmly believe, like Sugimoto, that through stillness and reflection a universe can be created. Cassilhaus was perhaps built with a similar intention in mind, and the collection of Frank Konhaus and Ellen Cassilly reflects their sympathy for this unapologetically modern idea.

--Lisa McCarty, Curator



Josiah McElhenny | *Extended Landscape Model for Total Reflective Abstraction* | 2005  
Mirrored glass table with hand blown mirrored glass objects

Isamu Noguchi | *R. Buckminster Fuller* | 1929 | Chrome-plated bronze

André Kertész | *Martinique* | 1972/1975 | Vintage Gelatin Silver Print

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Curated by Lisa McCarty  
Cassilhaus Gallery

<b>#1</b> <b>Masao Yamamoto</b> <i>Japanese</i>	<i>#121 from a Box of Ku</i> Toned Gelatin Silver Print	nd 22/40
<b>#2</b> <b>Hiroshi Watanabe</b> <i>Japanese</i>	<i>Agra Fort</i> Gelatin Silver Print	2000 1/15
<b>#3</b> <b>David Goldes</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Walk the Dog</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1994 8/25
<b>#4</b> <b>John Menapace</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Untitled (Mirror Solo)</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1982 Open
<b>#5</b> <b>Frank Konhaus</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Analog TRAverse (for Lisa)</i> UK Suck Light Fixture with 25 35mm Slides 1992-2000	2012 Unique
<b>#6</b> <b>André Kertész</b> <i>Czech</i>	<i>Martinique</i> Vintage Gelatin Silver Print	1972/1975 Open
<b>#7</b> <b>Mark Steinmetz</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Athens, GA (Girl on Car Hood)</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1996 8/14
<b>#8</b> <b>Frank Hunter</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Curtain Saul to Paul</i> Platinum Paladium on Tissue	2000 10/21
<b>#9</b> <b>Doug Keyes</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Eadweard Muybridge</i> Dye Coupler Print	2003 23/30
<b>#10</b> <b>Hiroshi Sugimoto</b> <i>Japanese</i>	<i>U.A. Walker, New York 1978</i> Photogravure	1978 500/1000
<b>#11</b> <b>John Menapace</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Untitled (Fox Talbot)</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1980 Open
<b>#12</b> <b>Caroline Hickman Vaughan</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Self Portrait, Father Mother</i> Permanent Pigment Print	1977/2012 Open

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<b>#13</b> <b>Lee Friedlander</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Galax, Virginia</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1962/2001 Open
<b>#14</b> <b>Aaron Siskind</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Untitled (Broken Glass) 1947</i> Vintage Gelatin Silver Print	1947 Open
<b>#15</b> <b>Connie Imboden</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Dead Silences I</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1988/2000 2/10
<b>#16</b> <b>Ryuji</b> <i>Japanese</i>	<i>Room with a View</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1989/2005 Open
<b>#17</b> <b>David Hilliard</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Green (Dyptic)</i> C-Print	2003 2/5
<b>#18</b> <b>Michael Prince</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Kalia and TV Westchester 2002</i> C-Print	2002 5/10
<b>#19</b> <b>Jack Spencer</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Cooter with Glass</i> Toned Gelatin Silver Print	1995 21/50
<b>#20</b> <b>Kenneth Josephson</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Matthew, 1965</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1965/2001 25/50
<b>#21</b> <b>Ray K. Metzker</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Philadelphia, 1963</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1963/1986 14/15
<b>#22</b> <b>Elizabeth Matheson</b> <i>American</i>	<i>Hillsborough</i> Chromogenic Print	1999 Open
<b>#23</b> <b>Tito Sanpaolesi</b> <i>Italian</i>	<i>Vaporetto Venezia</i> Gelatin Silver Print	1999 1/25
<b>#24</b> <b>Tamas Dezso</b> <i>Hungarian</i>	<i>Abandoned Room</i> Chromogenic Print	2011 1/6

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